

**Remarks the opening ceremony for the conference:  
“Domestic violence: Strengthening Community Partnerships”**

**Carolyn Hannan, Director**

**Division for the Advancement of Women  
Department of Economic and Social Affairs**

Excellencies  
Organizers of the conference  
Distinguished participants

It is my pleasure to make some remarks at the opening of the conference on “Domestic violence: Strengthening Community Partnerships”. I would like to begin by commending the collaboration on this important topic between the United Nations Division for Economic Support and Coordination and the US Department of Health and Human Services Region 11, Office on Women’s Health; the New York State Office for the Prevention of Domestic Violence; the Ecuadorian International Center; the International Immigrants Foundation; the NYC Committee on the Status of Women; and the Council on the Status of Latin-American Women. I would also like to acknowledge a number of members of the planning committee, in particular Dr Gilda A. Glasinovich, but also Lalla Khan, Sandra Estepa, Ruth Rodriguez, Martha Zambrano and Martha Laureano. I congratulate you and all your colleagues and partners for this important initiative. I would also like to take the opportunity to thank my colleague, the Director of the Division for ECOSOC Support and Coordination, Mr Sarbuland Khan, for his support to the issue of gender equality, as well as Ms Hanifa Mezoui for all her efforts on this conference.

Let me also say by way of opening, that the work of the United Nations for gender equality has benefited a great deal from the increase in NGO participation in the in recent years. The Division I head, the Division for the Advancement of Women, has been privileged to interact and work closely with many NGOs from around the world, including on the topic of violence against women. NGOs have contributed to the work of the United Nations in many ways. They have brought a rich new perspective into the global dialogue and debate on violence against women; played a key role in supporting, monitoring and implementating international agreements at national level; have contributed to a better understanding and appreciation by a diverse public of the issue; and provided support in very practical ways on the ground.

I know that many of you are carrying out important work on domestic violence at community level. In that context, I would like to share with you some of the work on violence against women, including domestic violence, at global level. There have been many important developments, and some upcoming processes, which can support you in your work. The work done at global, national and community level need to be more closely linked.

The year 2005 marks the ten-year anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing and the adoption of the Beijing Platform for Action in 1995. It is also 30 years since the first world conference on women in 1975. 134 Member States and one Observer State provided information to the United Nations on the specific steps they had taken to implement the strategic objectives of the Beijing Platform for Action, including the critical area of concern on violence against women. Responses indicate that gender-based violence is increasingly recognized as a form of discrimination against women and a violation of their human rights that requires a comprehensive response from Governments and other stakeholders. Many countries have passed laws and adopted policies to combat all forms of violence against women, including domestic violence. Growing attention is also being paid to the links between violence against women and the spread of HIV/AIDS. Violence against women, including domestic violence, remains one of the major challenges in the work on promoting and protecting the human rights of women and promoting gender equality and empowerment of women.

Governments should accelerate their efforts towards comprehensive strategies against violence, adequately funded and with a clear time frame. Strategies should include comprehensive legislative frameworks, protection for victims, assistance and legal aid as needed and access to shelters and other services with trained staff. Vulnerable women, including women in rural and remote areas, and migrant women, need specific protection. Women victims of domestic violence should have immediate means of redress and protection, including barring orders which remove the perpetrator from the conjugal home. Constant effort is also needed to eliminate the gender stereotypes and cultural attitudes lie that behind society's acceptance of violence against women. Advocacy and education is needed to raise awareness among all members of society, including men and boys.

The issue of violence against women has become an important focus of action at national and international levels. Significant work has been undertaken by States, entities of the United Nations system, NGOs and researchers to document violence against women and develop responses to more adequately prevent violence from occurring, to prosecute and punish perpetrators, and to provide remedies and relief to victims. In the Millennium Declaration of 2000, Heads of State resolved to combat all forms of violence against women. The General Assembly and the Commission on the Status of Women, the Commission on Human Rights and the Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice regularly adopt resolutions on violence against women. In 2003, the General Assembly adopted for the first time a resolution on the elimination of domestic violence against women. The International Day for the Eradication of Violence against Women, 25 November, adopted by the General Assembly in 1999, now regularly forms the backdrop for public debate at the national level, and is also the first of "16 days of activism against gender violence" a global campaign spearheaded by non-governmental organizations in all regions.

The United Nations treaty bodies consider violence against women in their dialogues with States parties and in their concluding comments and observations. The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women in particular

systematically and comprehensively monitors action to prevent violence against women, punish perpetrators and provide protection and support for victims. The Committee calls for immediate protection and redress for victims of violence. It encourages States parties to raise public awareness and improve the skills of law enforcement officials, the judiciary, health-care providers and social workers. It also calls for better data, disaggregated by sex, and further study of the scope and prevalence of violence against women. The Committee has adopted General Recommendation 12 on Violence Against Women to guide States parties in their reporting on violence against women. The Optional Protocol to the Convention provides a complaints procedure which offers women an international avenue of redress for alleged violations of their rights protected under the Convention, including domestic violence. Its inquiry procedure allows the Committee to conduct inquiries into situations of grave or systematic violations of the rights of women in States parties. To date 69 States have ratified the Optional Protocol which has the potential to become a highly effective international remedy for addressing gender-based violence and other violations of women's human rights.

Among the special procedures of the Commission on Human Rights, the Special Rapporteur on violence against women has made significant contributions to understanding of domestic violence, including through her analytical work and country visits, and the summary prepared on developments and good practice at global, regional and national levels between 1994 and 2003.

The General Assembly has called for an in-depth study on all forms of violence against women to be available in 2005. The Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Violence against Women identified three main areas of violence against women, violence in the family, violence in the general community and violence condoned by the State. The Division for the Advancement of Women is currently working on this study which will be critical for all future work on violence against women. It is being undertaken in collaboration with all parts of the United Nations working on violence against women, as well as a number of NGO coalitions. The study will cover violence that occurs in the home. It will also highlight violence suffered by disadvantaged groups of women, such as indigenous women, women migrant workers and women and girls with disabilities. The study will build on the research and work that has been undertaken so far, synthesize and evaluate findings, and identify effective strategies as well as gaps and challenges. The study will highlight good practices that have been developed. I am sure this conference will be able to provide many lessons learned and good practice examples.

Community responses to domestic violence are critical as are partnerships, the two important focuses of the conference. Community partnerships must involve men and boys as well as women and girls. For the first time in 2004, the Commission on the Status of Women addressed the issue of the role of men and boys in achieving gender equality. The Division for the Advancement of Women also organized an expert group meeting in Brazil on the same topic prior to the Commission to provide an input from experts from around the world. The role of men and boys in preventing violence against women was given a strong focus in the discussions in both the Commission and the Expert Group

Meeting. The Commission adopted agreed conclusions on the role of men and boys in achieving gender equality. I am sure that your discussions will include the importance of engaging men and boys in the family and in the community in eliminating domestic violence.

The Secretary-General has desecrated violence against women as perhaps the most shameful human rights violation. He has pointed to its pervasive nature and to the fact that it knows no boundaries of geography, culture or wealth. He has also stated that as long as it continues, we cannot claim to be making real progress towards equality, development and peace. In his message on the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women on 25 November, the Secretary-General noted that while violence against women is a challenge in itself, it comes with an added deadly dimension, the risk of HIV infection. Sexual violence increases women's vulnerability to the virus and can make it impossible for women to seek information and follow treatment. The Secretary-General stated: "Let us...pledge to do our utmost to protect women, banish such violence, and build a world in which women enjoy their rights and freedoms on an equal basis with men".

Your conference can make an important contribution to moving forward on addressing this critical issue. I wish you every success and look forward to receiving the outcome.

Thank you.